



Decision Memo

Fourmile Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

USDA Forest Service
Pagosa Ranger District, San Juan National Forest
Archuleta County, Colorado

Decision

I have decided to implement the Fourmile Hazardous Fuels Reduction project on up to 80 acres adjacent to NFSR 645 and NFSR 645.k in the Fourmile Creek area.

The purpose of the project is to improve forest health, reduce hazardous fuels, to protect municipal water infrastructure and private property/private property infrastructure. Access to the project area will be along NFSR 645. No new or temporary roads will be built as part of this project. Operations would be expected to occur from late spring through the fall months.

Treatment Objectives:

1. Improve forest health by reducing crown density and competition for nutrients and water and decreasing the risk of insect infestations.
2. Reduce and/or re-arrange understory fuels to influence potential fire behavior adjacent to roads to serve as a fuel break for management of unplanned ignitions.
3. Reduce the risk of wildfire to public land, private property and municipal water infrastructure.
4. Provide for firefighter safety.

My decision also incorporates the design criteria listed below:

Vegetation,

- Pre-settlement ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and aspen > 10 inches DBH will not be removed unless necessary for safety.
- Gamble oak greater than 6 inches DRC will be protected and retained as much as possible.
- Thinned material will be lopped/ scattered, piled for burning, or chipped to the greatest extent possible to avoid creating jackpots.
- Maximum allowable stump height for hand thinning operations is 8 inches.
- Chips will be dispersed to a maximum depth of 4 inches. Large chunks (greater than 4 inches wide or 12 inches long) and slash will be dispersed, lopped and scattered to a maximum depth of 2 feet.
- Material cut for post and poles or firewood removal will be located in areas that are safe for public to collect

Watershed and Soils

- Remove any cut slash, logs, debris that encroach into the Dutton Ditch.

Wildlife

- A wildlife biologist shall be notified immediately if raptor nests are discovered. If raptor nests are discovered measures will be applied to minimize disturbance impacts to breeding raptors.

Cultural Resources

- In the event that unidentified archaeological resources are discovered in the course of the project, a San Juan National Forest Archaeologist shall be notified immediately. Work must be stopped until the resources have been evaluated in terms of National Register of Historic Places eligibility criteria (36 CFR 60.4).

Category of the Proposed Action

This action falls under Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Section 32.2 (9), Categories of Actions for Which a Project or Case File and Decision Memo Are Required. Specifically, it falls under category 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6): *“Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.”* Based on the environmental analysis and past experience, the effects of implementing this action will be of limited context and intensity and will result in little or no adverse environmental effects to either the physical or biological components of the environment.

Finding on No Extraordinary Circumstances

The proposed project was analyzed by an interdisciplinary (ID) team of Forest Service specialists including a Fuels Specialist, Wildlife Biologist, Hydrologist, and Archeologist. Based on site specific field analysis, the Interdisciplinary Team has determined the following regarding extraordinary circumstances.

- 1.) **Threatened, endangered, or proposed species, their critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species:**
Federally Listed Species: A list of federally listed species was requested through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service IPAC website on June 08, 2020, Consultation Code 06E24100-2020-SLI-0295. Habitat for Canada lynx is present in the project area. Project analysis determined that the project *may affect but is not likely to adversely affect* Canada lynx. There is no potential habitat or designated critical habitat within the project area for any other federally listed fish, wildlife, or plant species.
Sensitive Plant Species: There are no known sensitive plant species in the project area, and no habitat for any sensitive plant species. Therefore, it was determined in the Biological Evaluation that this project will have no impact on sensitive plant species.
Sensitive Wildlife Species: Habitat is present in the project area for hoary bat, flammulated owl, Lewis' woodpecker, northern goshawk, olive-sided flycatcher, monarch butterfly and western bumblebee. It was determined in the Biological Evaluation that the proposed action *may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of viability in the planning area nor cause a trend toward federal listing* for these species. Potential impacts to sensitive species include temporary displacement and some habitat lost or altered. Based on the small scope, scale and duration of disturbance associated with project activities, effects are expected to be negligible or discountable and no cumulative effects are expected.
- 2.) **Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds:** There are floodplains or flood-prone area in the project area, but no adverse effects are anticipated. There are municipal supply watersheds or drinking water source areas in the project area, but no adverse effects are anticipated.
- 3.) **Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas:** The project is not within any congressionally designated areas; therefore, they will not be impacted.
- 4.) **Inventoried Roadless Areas:** This project does not fall within any inventoried roadless areas. Therefore, there will be no impact to these areas.
- 5.) **Research Natural Areas:** The project is not within an RNA; therefore, RNA's will not be impacted.

6.) **American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites. Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas.** No Native American or Alaska native religious or cultural sites are found within the project area. The proposed project area of potential effect (APE) was previously intensively (Class III) surveyed for the Universal Telephone Cable Installation in 1993 (13-0894), and for various projects related to the Dutton Ditch Special Use Permit (Dutton Ditch Pipeline 03-0110, Dutton Ditch Staging Areas 05-071, Dutton Ditch SUP 12-062). Dutton Ditch (5AA1733/5ML259) is the only recorded site within the APE and it was determined to be not eligible for the National Register by SHPO on 9/2/1993 and again in 12/2/2013. One isolated find (5ML86) was recorded in the proposed APE but was determined to be not eligible in previous cultural resource survey work. Based on previous survey, this project will have no effect on cultural resources.

Public Involvement

The Fourmile Fuels Hazardous Fuels Reduction project was first listed in the San Juan National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) in July 2020. No comments were received.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the 2013 San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act and was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and guidelines. The project area falls within Management Theme 3 – Landscapes with Limited Management, Management Theme 5 – Active Management and Management Theme 7—Public and Private Lands Intermix. The San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan released in September 2013 allows for the use of mechanical fuels treatment in these management areas. The project is also in compliance with other Federal, State, and local laws.

The proposed project was reviewed for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act. The proposed action, with design criteria, is in compliance with these laws. The District finds that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would warrant further analysis.

Implementation Date

This project may be implemented immediately upon signature of this document. Implementation is planned to begin in September 2020.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal pursuant to Forest Service Regulation 36 CFR 215.12 (f).

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Fred Ellis, (970) 264-1541, Pagosa Ranger District, San Juan National Forest, P.O. Box 310, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147.

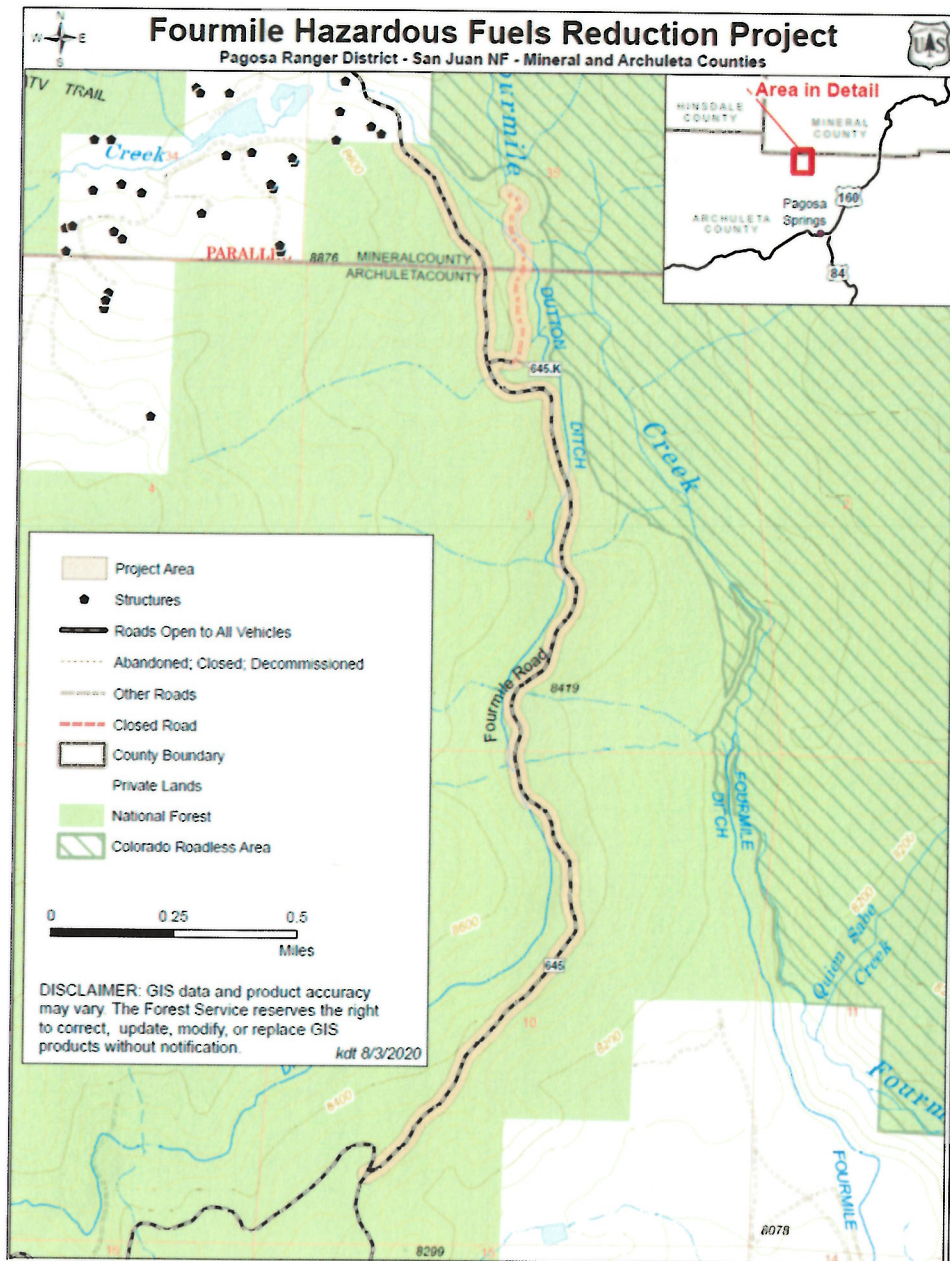


Kevin C. Khung
District Ranger



Date

Attachment 1 – Map of the Project Area



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